

But What About the Jews?

To the Romans...Pt. 18

[**CNN clip :39**] Two week ago, I announced I would be speaking about Israel today. And if you have been paying attention to the news, current events have helped to promote my sermon! I told somebody that my first thought was, “Wow, God must really be setting up this message for me.” But then my second thought was if I’m going to see an outbreak of conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East as providential, I would have to call it a miracle if I was going to teach on Noah’s Ark in Seattle and it rained that week. Probably *not* a miracle.

But whatever *we* think about current events, almost 2,000 years ago, the Apostle Paul was certainly thinking about the people that make up the nation of Israel. We’ve been walking through his letter to the church at Romans this year – a church that includes both Jewish and Gentile Christians, don’t forget – and today we come to a new section. And it’s a section that has vexed scholars and preachers alike probably since it was written.

Here’s how NT Wright, one of my favorite Pauline scholars, puts it, “Romans 9-11 is as full of problems as a hedgehog is of prickles. Many have given it up as a bad job, leaving Romans as a book with eight

chapters of ‘gospel’ at the beginning, four of ‘application’ at the end, and three of puzzle in the middle.” (NT Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 231)

And the section that we cover today is indeed a puzzle. And let me confess right up front, it’s not a puzzle I can put together for you in one sermon – and that’s all we’re going to spend on it. But the reality is, it’s not a puzzle any of us can fully solve – even Paul understood this as we’ll see. Puzzles are challenging. For Christmas our family got a jigsaw puzzle of the earth from space – round, no edges, and 80% blue ocean. We started it...and eventually put it back in the box! Puzzles take time.

I spent an hour on the phone this week with a dear friend of mine. He’s been a missionary to Israel for decades – ministering mostly to Palestinians - and he is likely in the handful of smartest people I know. A brilliant scholar of the Bible and practitioner of the faith. And so he was very generous with my time to discuss this section of Romans with me. Remember, we *talked* longer than this sermon is going to *be*. And at one point I said, “This doesn’t need to be a sermon, not even a series, it needs to be a semester-long graduate seminar. The problem is, you and I are the *only* persons who would find it remotely interesting!”

In fact, I'm concerned that this sermon is going to bore 80% of you, because it might be answering questions that you're not asking. While at the same time, upsetting 20% of you, because it goes against the conventional wisdom of a couple of prominent contemporary views that people tend to be very passionate about. So it's a bit of a lose-lose proposition, which is probably an Anthony signature message!

But I don't think we should give up on Romans 9-11 – I don't think we should give up on *any* part of the Bible – but this one especially has important things to say to our world, and plays a crucial role in the argument of Paul's letter. Now, so far, we've said that chapters 1-5 deal with Paul's theology of salvation – how we are made righteous through Jesus's death on the cross and Resurrection. And then chapters 6-8 are about how that righteousness subsequently allows us to live changed lives.

We ended chapter 8 last week on a tremendous crescendo of confidence, as Paul explains that God's faithfulness guarantees our final assurance of salvation, not based on anything we have done, but on what God has done for us through His Son. Remember, "What can separate us from the love of Christ?" And Paul's answer was *nothing*!

But now, Paul can imagine someone in his audience saying, "Hold on, Paul. You say that when God calls someone, He always brings them all the way home. But what about the Jews? God called them, God established a covenant with them through Abraham, He came to them in the person of Jesus, but most of them have rejected Jesus as the Messiah in the present time. So maybe God's calling and purpose can be rejected? If God promised that Israel would be His people, yet the majority do not believe in Christ as the way of salvation, does that mean that God's promise has failed?"

And Paul is going to say "No." But can you see how the question of Jewish unbelief is of vital importance not only to a first-century church containing both Jews and Gentiles, but for us too. Paul's answer in these three chapters takes us deep into who God is and how God works. And that's helpful for everybody.

Now, normally we start out by reading our text for the morning, but I can't possibly read you all three chapters. But I do want to read Paul's opening verses - and actually I'll end by reading the closing verses of the passage – and we'll fill in the pieces in between as best we can.

So first, **Romans 9:1-5**, “*I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.*”

So we’re going to talk about Paul’s race this morning, “the people of Israel”. But even just saying that is somewhat problematic. What do we mean by Israel? Paul is going to address that very thing actually. But for us today, it’s even more problematic because since May 14, 1948, there is a sovereign nation-state of Israel. And it’s important to note up front that Paul is not talking about that. You can’t automatically read modern Israel into Romans 9-11, although some mistakenly do. This is not just apples to apples. But it’s not apples to automobiles *either*. Paul’s definition – as complex as we’ll see it to be in a moment - certainly does not *exclude* the ethnic race of Jews. And make no mistake, the modern nation of Israel *is* a Jewish state.

And this goes to the two problems I see being made about Israel today. Almost opposite errors. One tends to be from the left and the other from the right. On the left is a condemnation of Israel as a sovereign state

because of their treatment of the Arab minority in their midst. It’s a very prickly issues, but there is a rising anti-semitism in the world in recent years and a lot of the delegitimization of Israel plays right into it.

But then on the more conservative end of the spectrum you find a number of – mostly evangelical Christians – who almost worship Israel with a militant view of their role in the end times – a rather shaky view of the Book of Revelation in my opinion. There’s almost the idea that Israel can do no wrong. That as God’s chosen people, they get a free pass. It’s almost like to critique Benjamin Netanyahu is to take a stand against God. But both those views are wrong, dangerous to world peace and diametrically opposed to the argument Paul is laying out in this section of Romans.

In fact, N.T. Wright addresses this as well, “Either Paul is an apocalyptic dreamer, fantasizing about a future ingathering of the Jews, or he is the New Testament prophet of the modern state of Israel: or, perhaps, he is something in between...” I vote for the “something in between”. So let me structure it like this for the morning. Paul shows us three things. First, the *problem* with the Jews. Then, a *warning* for the Gentiles. And finally, a *hope* for everybody. Again, we’re not going to solve a 2,000 year old problem in one sermon, and you may want to talk more after – please do, but let’s jump in.

First, The Problem with the Jews. And I don't even like how that sounds coming out of *my* mouth! But it's ultimately coming from Paul's mouth. Paul has a critique – a strong critique for the Jewish people. But Paul is a good pastor. That means that he has a critique for *everybody* in the church. The gospel has a way of stepping on everyone's toes. So a pastor has to be an equal opportunity offender. Which doesn't make us very popular by the way. They eventually cut Paul's head off!

So Paul starts with the Jews, but look how he starts; empathy, identification, heart broken, sacrificial love. In fact, there's a sense in which the very structure of these three chapters gives *us* a roadmap of how to handle conflict. How do we deal with conflict? Be it in a nation, a tribe, a family, a church? Do it like Paul does, start with empathy. If your **passion** about an issue doesn't resound with **compassion** for the people, you're probably doing it wrong. So that's how he starts.

And then – as we'll see – Paul ends by leaving it in God's hands. Ultimately, God is the judge. We're not. And aren't we glad? Believe me, you should thank God every day that Anthony is not the judge of the universe. Have you ever seen the *Twilight Zone* episode about a boy named Anthony who has god-like powers? Yeah, it'd be just like that. So you have to be willing to call people out for truth, but in the end, you have to leave it with Christ.

Now, Paul's strongest critique in this section is for the Jews – two of the three chapters are addressed to them – and that's appropriate because they are his tribe. Even though he's called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, he is and always will be a Jew, a child of Abraham, a son of Israel. It reminds me of a quote I like by the great American writer, James Baldwin, "I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually." (James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*)

I resonate with that. For example, when I talk about race issues in America – and the gospel call to justice requires that I must – a pushback I get sometimes is "What about the blacks? Why does racism just have to be white?" Well, if I were an African-American pastor speaking to a black – or predominately black – congregation, I'm sure I would have some things to say. But I'm not. So the brunt on my prophetic words are directed at *my* tribe.

Jesus gave us some wise advice in this regard, in **Luke 6:42**, "*How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*"

So in that vein, I will actually be spending more time on the Gentile critique this morning because, that's our tribe. And we have plenty to be critiqued on when it comes to Jewish-Gentile relations over the history of the church and today. But let's start where Paul starts. What's the problem with Israel?

First of all, quickly, what does Paul mean when he speaks of Israel. He starts off by making the argument that it's not actually about race. The Jews are called "the children of Abraham" and that's very true, but Paul says, what makes the seed of Abraham special is spiritual, not blood – a unique relationship with God, not DNA. So **v.8**, "*In other words, it is not the children by **physical descent** who are God's children, but it is **the children of the promise** who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.*"

What's that promise? Way back in Genesis, God makes a special covenant with Abraham and through him his descendants. God said, "I'm going to bless you so that you can be a blessing to the whole world." Blessed to be a blessing. Notice, it's *not* an unconditional covenant. Not at all! Unlike the New Testament covenant that succeeded it, the covenant of the Old Testament – or the Law – is absolutely tied to an "I will if you will" covenant. You read it all the time in the prophets, "*If my people...then I will.*" And it's dangerous when you start mixing the two

covenants - as we talked about at length a couple of years ago in our *Tale of Two Testaments* series.

So Abraham's descendants are those who stick to the covenant, which Paul makes clear is not just bloodline, because he uses several examples in this chapter – Ishmael, Esau – of people who were physically related to Abraham, but not considered – even by Israel herself – to be "children of the promise". This is a key point, all through the Old Testament, Israel's own prophets make a distinction between ethnic Israel and spiritual Israel – a "remnant" they call it. Paul summarizes that thought in **v. 6**, "*...For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*"

Ok, so who is it that keeps the covenant? Paul goes back to the Hebrew Bible – he's quoting their own scriptures over and over in these chapters to make his argument – to show that the big way in which Israel failed to honor the covenant of Abraham is they do not submit to the Lordship of the Messiah. It would take more time than I have, but there are all kinds of Old Testament decrees that the coming of Messiah would fulfill the covenant. Deuteronomy chapter 30 is a big one, and Paul quotes it prominently in this chapter.

And of course, Paul's confession is that the Messiah has come and who is he? Jesus Christ, the son of Mary and Joseph, the carpenter from Galilee. Which was scandalous to be sure, and in the rejection of Jesus, Paul's Jewish brothers and sisters stumbled.

Romans 9:31-32, "*The people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.*"

This is the reason Paul says they are lost, they are cursed, they are cut off – the rejection of Jesus as Lord and Messiah. **Romans 10:3-4**, "*Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*" The problem is the Jews – in large part, remember, Jesus, Paul and the Apostles are all Jews – but as a whole, they have rejected Jesus.

But that's not *just* a Jewish problem is it? That's what Paul has set up in Romans from chapter one as *the* problem with the entire human race. The reason why the world is in the terrible shape it is. Human beings – of all races and sexes and classes – have worshipped created things in the place of the Creator and therefore have become slaves to sin instead of liberated in

Jesus. Jesus himself said, **John 14:6**, "~~Jesus~~ *answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Not Jews, not Gentiles, not Americans... "no one"! Jesus is everything. That is *the* claim of Christianity.

And so a rejection of Jesus as Messiah is the problem – but it's just as much a problem in Austin as it is in Israel. Be careful, don't fall for the old, "the Jews killed Jesus" slander. And it *is* slander. Listen, who are the Christ killers? My Bible says it was the Romans – *my* ethnic people – that erected the cross and drove in the nails. Jewish religious leaders brought the unjust charges, and the pagan Romans pronounced the unjust sentence. The point of the Passion narrative is *all of humanity is responsible for the death of Jesus.*

Ok, so Paul's argument is that Jews don't get special treatment when it comes to their standing with God. Yes, they were the first in the covenant, but not the last – it was meant to be a global covenant from the very beginning. And it's a covenant that has always pointed to its completion in the arrival of the Messiah. So the Jews have a Jesus problem. But so do you. And so do I. Until we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord. But I'm getting into next week's message!

So that's the problem with Jews, but as so often happens, when you correct one side's failure – those of you that have parented multiple children know this very well. You ever discipline one of your children for something they've done wrong – say not telling the truth - and *another* child chimes in, “Yeah, you're a liar.” And then you turn and say, “You button it, I'm talking to her, we'll get to *your* issue next.” That's exactly what happens in Romans 9-11. Paul brings a correction to the Jewish members of the Roman church and even as he's writing, he can hear Gentile members going, “Yeah...”

And Paul's going to say, “You button it!” Which leads us to **part two, A Warning for the Gentiles**. And his warning is really in the same vein that it is to his own Jewish people. It's a warning for any “blessed” people. Are you blessed? Do you have the t-shirt or the bumper sticker? “#Blessed!” Well, you're blessed...to be a blessing. And if you ever forget the “to be a blessing part”, watch out.

See, this is the problem with American Nationalism – one of the problems – if you think “God blessed America” or that we are a “Christian nation”...be careful. First of all, let me correct something that should be obvious – America is *not* Israel, is not the “new” Israel and it's a twisting of Scripture to say it is. But you better hope it's not, because to whom much is given, much is required. That's not Spider-Man, that's the Bible. Those God specially blesses, He specially holds accountable when they fall short of their responsibility to be a blessing.

So Paul says in **Romans 11:11-12**, “*Again I ask: Did they*” – Israel - “*stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, **because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!***”

God's plan all along was the salvation of the whole world under the Lordship of the Messiah. And God tasked Israel with carrying out that plan. And they did bring the Messiah into the world – Jesus was, is and always will be a Jew when it comes to the fully human part of his nature – but then they rejected him, which obviously means they didn't carry out their mission of spreading the good news about Jesus to the rest of the world.

But God is not going to let His plan fail – He loves us too much for that. So he got a small group of Jews that *did* believe Jesus was the Messiah – 120 of them in an upper room in Acts 2 - and began to work through *them*. This is clearly Peter's message to his own countrymen – just like Paul – in his Pentecost day sermon. **Acts 2:36**, “*Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.*” That's the message of the gospel.

And now non-Jews are spreading the message. But don't get cocky, in His sovereign grace, God is using the "outsider" to bring the message back to the original "insiders" so that *everyone* can be on the inside together. Of course the problem with sinful human beings is as soon as an outsider gets on the inside, what happens? Too often they just become the new insider bully.

And that was threatening to happen in the church in Rome. See, in Paul's letter to the church at Galatia, he's correcting the opposite error. The Jewish majority insiders were oppressing the Gentile minority outsiders saying, "If you want to really be saved – be right with God – then you have to look like us." And Paul put a stop to that. But now, in Rome the tables are reversed. There are a lot more Gentile believers than Jewish ones. Can you see how High School is a metaphor for all of human history!

So Paul pulls out an example from agriculture. Some of you that are advanced gardeners will get this. You create a hybrid plant species by grafting the stem of one plant into another. So Paul gives the Gentiles a warning.

Romans 11:17-18, *"If some of the branches have been broken off,"* – the Jews - *"and you, though a wild olive shoot,"* - the Gentiles – *"have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you."*

In other words, "it ain't about you." Don't get cocky. You know the type of people who were born on third base and act like they hit a triple. The mark of a Christian is one of deep **humility**, never **privilege**. It's not I, but Christ in me that accomplishes anything and everything. And any blessing that comes into your life should never be "look how good I am" but always, "look how good God is!" That's a key Christian virtue and mindset.

He continues, **V.19-21**, *"You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either."*

You see the warning? Do the Jews have a problem? Yes. But they don't have any problem the rest of us don't have. As the Jewish comedian said, "Jews are just like everybody else, only more so." All of humanity is united in a problem – and Paul's argument throughout Romans is that problem – underneath every other problem – is a failure to make Jesus the Lord of your life. He's the branch, and as he himself warned us, outside of the branch, we can do nothing. The vine – *any* vine – that is cut off from the source of life that flows through the branch will wither up and die.

So we non-Jews are grafted into the vine to tell the world about the love of Jesus. And what then should our relationship to our spiritual older brothers, the Jews, be? We're supposed to be so good to them that they become – remember Paul's word? – “envious” of what we have. Gentiles are called to live such Christ-like lives that we make everyone else – including the Jews – want to have that same power of Christ in their own lives. “Always preach the gospel and sometimes use words.”, St. Francis said.

So, thinking back on what you know about Jewish-Christian relations through the 2,000 year history of the church – and because you are Americans, chances are you don't know much – but come on, you've seen *Schindler's List*! Would you say that on the balance, Christians have been so loving towards the Jews as to make them envious of Jesus? Are you kidding me? Of course not! Just the opposite. We've made the name of Jesus Christ a curse word.

In medieval Europe, Good Friday was the most dangerous day of the year to be a Jew. Christians would go and ransack Jewish homes and beat and even kill the inhabitants. And it was often their priest that led the way! The Good Friday persecution of Jews didn't really stop until after World War II. Speaking of the Holocaust, that atrocity - the greatest in human history in my opinion, and if you want to disagree with me, you'll need to join me on a trip to Auschwitz first – but without centuries of Christian anti-semitism the Holocaust would have been unthinkable.

Oh, you can make the argument, “Hitler wasn't a Christian” and I agree with you. But his parents were. The generation that raised the Nazis were all Christians. At the time of the War, Germany was the most evenly divided nation in the world between Protestant and Catholic Christians - 50/50 split – and both groups planted the seeds for the Holocaust. It was Pope Innocent the III – actually called the protector of the Jews in the 12th century – he issued a decree that – while you couldn't kill Jews – they had to wear a visible badge at all times to identify themselves. It became known as the “mark of shame.”

Fast forward a few hundred years and when Martin Luther was breaking away from the Catholic Church – the father of the Protestant Reformation – he too started off rather pro-Jewish, but by the end of his life, he'd changed his tune. In a letter he wrote entitled, “What shall we Christians do with this damned, rejected race of the Jews?” Luther laid out a seven point plan that included setting fire to their synagogues and Torah scrolls, destroying their homes, seizing their passports and restricting travel, and removal from their professions to be placed in hard labor camps.

Well, it's not hard to connect the dots, is it? Hitler's final solution may have been birthed in hell, but the midwives were agents of the church. You can practically see him reaching back to Pope Innocent, "A badge to identify Jews? Why don't mind if I do. Here's a yellow star." And then to Luther, "Mind if I borrow that list of yours, Reverend? Burn their homes and synagogues, forbid their worship and economy, check."

And these are just two illustrations; if you're ever in Warsaw Poland be sure to visit the Museum of the History of the Polish Jews – it's a never ending history of oppression. Whenever I meet a Jew who is suspicious of Christians, I just tip my hat to them and think "Smart guy." If you grew up Catholic or Protestant...we have blood on our hands. And that's why I am so concerned about the rise of anti-semitism in the world today. Make no mistake, it *is* on the rise again – especially in the Middle East - but in Europe and America as well. But it's subtle.

One of the best definitions of it comes from my favorite Rabbi, the late Jonathon Sacks who has been the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. He died just this year - made me very sad – but I've been listening to him and reading his books for years. Listen to what he has to say.

"What then is anti-Semitism? It is not a coherent set of beliefs but a set of contradictions. Before the Holocaust, Jews were hated because they were poor *and* because they were rich; because they were communists *and* because they were capitalists; because they kept to themselves *and* because they infiltrated everywhere; because they clung tenaciously to ancient religious beliefs *and* because they were rootless cosmopolitans who believed nothing."

"Anti-Semitism is a virus that survives by mutating. In the Middle Ages, Jews were hated because of their religion. In the 19th and 20th centuries they were hated because of their race. Today they are hated because of their nation state, Israel. Anti-Zionism is the new anti-Semitism." (Rb. Jonathan Sacks, Newsweek, April 4, 2016)

He's right. Anti-Zionism, is inherently anti-Jewish. You say, "No, no, no, I just think the *State* of Israel was a mistake, not the Jews." But the Jews will tell you, unless they have a place to defend themselves, they won't exist. That's the lesson of thousands of years of history. And they are right. Nobody has ever really been the protector of Israel for long. Not even the good ol' U S of A. Go Google the *MS St. Louis*, a ship filled with 937 Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany in 1939, that were turned away at the Miami port by "liberal" FDR and the US State Department. *The Miami Herald* proclaimed "Abandoned by the Word". That's been the history of the Jews in our word.

And it was finally our understanding of that guilt that led to the creation of modern Israel after the War. “But Anthony, what they’re doing to the Palestinians in Gaza is not right.” No it’s not. It’s a complicated situation to be sure. You’ll never answer the question of who was there first. The truth is nobody has the original land deed to the Middle East – or anywhere else for that matter. But the bottom line is, Do the Jewish people have the right to maintain their own sovereign state? And I believe that they do. Look, every nation took over land from someone who was there before them. Um...Texas is not an English word.

It’s wrong to say - as some far right-wingers do – that ethnically, Palestinians don’t really exist. Ridiculous, they’ve been in that region longer than any non-indigenous Americans have been here...and we’re not leaving because “this is our land”. But it’s also wrong to say – as some left-wingers do – that Israel is denying the existence of an Arab State. Have you ever looked at a map of the Middle East? There *is* an Arab State, it’s called Jordan and Lebanon and Syria and Egypt and Iraq and Saudi Arabia. All the nations that surround Israel, the *only* Jewish state on the planet. And throughout their history those nations have officially called for the destruction of Israel.

Which is a reminder that before we start talking about human rights violations, shouldn’t we remember the plank in our own eye? Look, it is not anti-Semitic to criticize the Israeli government or their policy decisions. They *are* encroaching on agreed upon Palestinian settlements in Gaza and the West Bank – the current right-wing coalition in charge of Israel is going back on some treaties. But what do we do about that? What did anyone do when America was breaking treaties with *our* Native People’s? I don’t condone it...but I haven’t given my house over to a Comanche family ether, have I? It’s complicated.

Listen, if “terrorists” – or “freedom fighters” depending on your point of view – from Matamoros, routinely fired rockets into Brownsville, killing our citizens, and their government said, “Sorry, there’s nothing we can do to stop them, wink”. Let’s not kid ourselves, we would *own* Mexico, wouldn’t we? We’re not going to let that happen. If the Canadian Constitution called for the extermination of the United States, we’d own *both* sides of Niagara Falls, come one!

“So Anthony, you’re saying Palestinian violence excuses Israeli abuses.” No I’m not. The sad truth is, violence begets violence in this fallen world and it is the prerogative of the followers of the Prince of Peace to bring a prophetic word against it.

In my own country, as tragic as the events of 9/11 were, they do not excuse many of the human rights violations we committed in Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and numerous other places in Afghanistan and Iraq. And that's just now, don't get me started on Japanese Internment Camps.

So like James Baldwin, *because* I love my country, I reserve the right to call her out when she violates her own standards of righteous behavior. But I don't deny America's *right to exist* because she has so often failed to live up to her ideals. And the same should be true of Israel. I believe we should hold our friends to account every bit as much – in fact more – than our enemies – *because* they are our friends. I don't know the solution to the Israel-Palestinian quagmire, but I can guarantee you that, short of the return of Jesus, it's only going to be an approximate one.

And that means by definition that both parties will be ultimately displeased. If anybody is getting *everything* they want, somebody is being abused. There will have to be concessions and disappointments on both sides or we're not even getting close to God's view of justice. All of our justice in this present world is provisional. So by all means, let's hold our allies, Israel, to a standard of justice. But let's do it *as* allies, guaranteeing their right to exist as a nation – a flawed, sinful nation, just like all the rest of us.

But listen, I don't believe we should be Israel's ally because of some strained eschatological end-time picture of "God's plan for Israel" – many of the Christian prophecies that have followed the creation of a modern state of Israel are just goofy. But we have a biblically *ethical* reason to support the Jews. Because, as Paul says, God loved, created and called the Jewish people and He's not done with them. So why would we *want* them to disappear? They gave us the Messiah! We have a responsibility to care for them. And too often, we grafted-in, Gentile Christians have failed in our responsibility.

But there is good news. After the problem of the Jews and the warning to the Gentiles, Paul ends on an up note. And that's our closing point, **A Hope for Everybody**. Look what he says in **Romans 11:25-26**, "*I do not want you to be ignorant of this **mystery**, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way **all Israel will be saved**...*"

Oh, ok, so in the end it all works out? Yes! God has't given up on Israel? Yes! God will fulfill His faithful promise? Yes! Paul's longing that his fellow countrymen won't be forever cut off will be realized? Yes! So it doesn't matter what Jews believe about Jesus, they're just in. No! You've got to remember who "all Israel" consists of.

Who did Paul say are the “children of Abraham” the children of the promise? It’s not about blood, it’s about faith. Faith in who? In Jesus Christ. Or another way to say it; It’s not about race, it’s about grace. There was a song we used to sing in Sunday School, sing along if you know it...

Father Abraham had many sons,
Many sons had father Abraham
I am one of them and so are you
So let’s all praise the Lord
Right arm...

It’s the *100 Bottles of Beer on the Wall* of Christian hymns! But it’s correct. I am a child of Abraham. And so are you...*if...*what? If you put your faith in the Messiah. It is proper to say that Christians are spiritually Jewish – we’re grafted into God’s chosen people, don’t forget. But be careful. We have not *replaced* the original people.

Another NT Wright quote is advisable, “Ironically, it is against Christian arrogance - specifically, Gentile Christian arrogance - that Romans 9-11 is explicitly directed. Paul is writing, with all the weight of eleven chapters of theology behind him, in order to say that ‘gentile Christians’ have not ‘replaced’ Jews as the true people of God. The church has not become an exclusively gentile possession. Precisely because the gospel stands athwart all ethnic claims, the church cannot erect a new racial boundary.”

So, not *replaced*, but *joined* as we all together embrace Jesus Christ as Lord. So how does it happen? If Jews have to come to God through Jesus – just like everyone else – then when does that happen? That’s the million dollar question, isn’t it? But can I tell you, that’s been the question for a long, long time.

The very last words that Jesus spoke on this earth were prompted by that very question. This is **Acts 1:6-9**, *“Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”*

And that right there is the exact pattern that Paul lays out nearly 30 years later when he writes Romans chapters 9-11. Israel will be restored. When? I don’t know...it’s a mystery. But in the meantime we have a job to do. What? Be witnesses. Tell everybody – and I mean *everybody*; every color, every gender, every language, every nation, every class, tell *everybody* - how they too can become children of Abraham. And it’s not by waving your arm and your leg!

Well, what is it? How do we become children of the promise? How do we get grafted in to the true Israel who will be saved? Paul tells us very clearly in chapter 10 – some of the most life-changing words in all the Bible, you’ve heard me use them nearly every week - and so I’m going to show you what Paul shows us...*next* Sunday!

We’re out of time. Listen, if you don’t know if you are a Christian, if there’s something burning in your heart right now that says, “I’ve got to know. I can’t wait one more moment to get right with God. What if I’m hit by a bus before next Sunday.” Well, see me after church and I’ll tell you. But it’s the same message I tell you every week. It’s been told for 2,000 years and it will be told for however many more years there are that God grants us to tell it.

But really, you don’t have to fully understand it to be affected by it. All you have to do is say to God, “Jesus, would you accept me in? I believe in you and what to be a part of your family.” There’s no magic to it, just faith. But while there’s no magic I can’t deny there’s a mystery. I don’t know all the answers to how it works out. How exactly will “all Israel” be saved? What is the end-time harvest of souls going to look like? I don’t know. It’s not for me to know all the Father’s plans.

But I know enough. Enough to know that Jesus wants to save each and every one who will call on him. Enough to know what that means for my marching orders from here until the end of my days. Enough to worship God with all my heart. But in the end, I have to embrace the mystery of the love of God. Even the great apostle Paul had to. Which is why at the end of this incredibly dense and important section of his letter to the Romans, all he can manage to say is...

(Romans 11:33-36), *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?” For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”*

Let’s pray...